


This copy is for your personal non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies of Toronto Star content for distribution to colleagues, clients or customers, or inquire about permissions/licensing, please go to: www.TorontoStarReprints.com

LOCAL : NEWS

Ancaster Redeemer University student calls for change on how education institution addresses LGBTQ+ students

By **Kevin Werner** Reporter

Mon., Dec. 5, 2022 | 4 min. read

 Set Ancaster as My Local news Article was updated Dec. 14, 2022

Redeemer University student Bekett Noble strongly believed the education institution could change.

For years, Noble had been writing to staff and faculty about the daily microaggressions targeting LGBTQ+ students at the university. Noble participated in meetings with staff, raising the issue and desperately asking for help. They started Genesis, a group to support queer students, and they participated on a committee for LGBTQ+ relations with faculty and student Senate members.

"I have advocated in every way I knew how, despite the fact that all those ways put me well outside my comfort zone," Noble stated in an email.

They had "gently and carefully" worked with Redeemer officials to "look at the detrimental effects of the way LGBTQ+ students are treated and how to effect positive change."

They found some staff and faculty were willing to listen, but no change occurred because Redeemer officials "are unwilling to change" for the benefit of donors.

Eventually, Noble looked around and found it was "clear to me that nothing meaningful was going to happen." They quickly learned about the "detrimental effects" that conservative religious organizations have on the mental, physical and academic health of queer people. To potentially effect change in the culture at the university, Noble stated "things need to be shared more bluntly because they are incredibly serious" and that if change didn't happen soon, "someone was going to die."

But change didn't happen, and on Nov. 23, Noble took their own life in the university's counsellor's office. An extensive email message was sent to various university officials on Nov. 24 at 8 a.m. that outlined Noble's beliefs, fears and suggestions to help queer and trans students still attending Redeemer University.

"I never thought it would be me who was finally the first to collapse under the weight of everything we go through to try and get a Christian education while embracing who God created us to be," they stated.

Noble in the email stated they had "dealt with suicide a lot in my life" and was "capable" of addressing. "But evidently, I was wrong."

Ancaster resident Megg Markettos, whose family embraced Noble, was devastated by the loss.

"Bekett was like one of our family members," said Markettos. "One of the best people you will ever meet and get to know. Their loss is profound for us and the community."

Markettos, who was preparing a Celebration of Life for Noble, says she hopes their death "gives Genesis a voice" in the community.

Shannon McBride, Redeemer University's communications manager, stated in an email the institution learned of the "tragic death" of a student on campus.

"The community is deeply saddened by this tremendous loss," she stated.

Classes were cancelled on Nov. 24 and the university's flag was lowered to half-staff. Next of kin were notified and the university is co-operating with police.

The university, stated McBride, is unable to release any further information at this time.

Hamilton police did not provide information to Hamilton Community News about the investigation after repeated requests.

McBride said Redeemer has made available mental health supports for students, faculty and staff and “the community is grieving and supporting one another through various opportunities.”

The Canadian Medical Association Journal of June 2022 identifies that transgender and sexual minority adolescents were at an increased risk of suicidal ideation and attempts.

A Trans Pulse study found trans youth have a high risk of suicide, with 47 per cent of trans people aged 16-24 considering suicide in the past, while 19 per cent attempted suicide. Reasons for considering suicide include family rejection, violence and harassment.

Noble, in their email, suggested ideas for the university to start supporting its LGBTQ+ students, including creating a safe space similar to Mohawk College’s Social Inc., where “marginalized groups can go” such as a room for students to hang out and build community; training for staff and faculty on trauma-informed care of marginalized population; proper counselling services; changing policies that currently promotes the idea that LGBTQ+ people are sinners based on their sexual orientation or gender identity; address queer student complaints about harassment and have “real consequences” for the perpetrators.

“They are the bare minimum in my opinion,” for the university to adopt, said Noble.

Noble said in the email the counselling services before the university changed from Shalem Mental Health Network to Christian Counselling Centre was a “lifeline and when it got cut with no talk about how it might be able to exist again that was the beginning of the end.”

“I hope at the very least that this will force people to take this issue seriously and implement change to properly support LGBTQ+ students from a trauma-informed lens,” they said.

Noble called on the university community to support President Dr. David Zietsma “to implement some of his visions” for Redeemer’s future, calling some of his ideas “positive” to unite a divided university.

“It didn’t have to come to suicide to lose a student, but it did,” stated Noble. “Don’t let it happen again.”

If you are having suicidal thoughts, there is help. The Canada Suicide Prevention Service can be reached at [1-833-456-4566](tel:1-833-456-4566) 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year or online at www.crisisservicescanada.ca. If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911.

SHARE:

My Local

New Feature! Go to the MyLocal page to customize your local news. >



Select a community for local news



LOCAL : NEWS

Hundreds of families attend Ancaster-area dairy farm open house

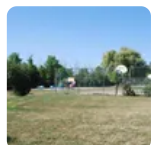
2 hrs ago



LOCAL : NEWS

Dundas' Valley Community Centre Park upgrades require additional funds

2 hrs ago



LOCAL : ANCASTER NEWS

OPINION

A new year will bring new challenges for Ontarians

2 hrs ago



Copyright owned or licensed by Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. All rights reserved. Reproduction or distribution of this content is expressly prohibited without the prior written consent of Toronto Star Newspapers Limited and/or its licensors. To order copies of Toronto Star articles, please go to: www.TorontoStarReprints.com